

Book Reviews

Karamat Ali (ed). *Pakistan: The Political Economy of Human Resource Development*. Lahore/Karachi/Islamabad: Vanguard Books (Pvt.), 2001. 231 pages. Hardbound. Rs 595.00.

Human resource development has assumed primary importance in the development process since the Industrial Revolution. Historical experience indicates that a major share of the wealth of nations is explained by investment in human capital [UNDP, *Human Development Report* (1996)]. Major developed countries invest billions of dollars in the development of human resources to raise their economic growth rates. The development of Japan is attributed entirely to the development of its human resources. Other Asian countries such as Singapore, Korea, Hong Kong, and Taiwan are also following in the footsteps of Japan in their pursuit of development.

Education plays an important role in the formation of human capital, which leads to economic and social growth. Every year huge resources are committed in the developed countries to attain high levels of literacy. Education not only provides the ingredients for growth and development but also creates a certain harmony and order in society. Pakistan has accorded low priority to education in its overall development planning due to a number of reasons. The dearth of financial resources has constrained the budget allocations for the education sector; the lack of political will has hampered the efforts of the civil society to increase literacy levels in the country. As a result, we have not achieved any significant improvements in our human development indicators.

This book edited by Karamat Ali examines the policies of the successive governments in the context of human resource development. The editor points out that Pakistan did not pursue indigenous policies for development but rather adopted policies borrowed from the Western countries, which do not adequately address the issues faced by developing countries. In his opinion, the borrowed policies are responsible for creating disparities in society by favouring some particular sectors while ignoring others. Resources were diverted from potentially vibrant sectors to inefficient sectors, thereby putting a burden on the economy. In the agriculture sector, for example, pro-rich policies were implemented which benefited big and absentee landlords and ignored small and landless farmers. The rural sector received minimal attention and the majority of the rural population was deprived of the opportunities. These policies created imbalances in society and worsened the poverty and income distribution problems.

The book contains eleven chapters addressing important issues confronting Pakistan. These include female education, child labour, unemployment, poverty, and foreign aid in the context of human resource development. The first chapter of the book, written by Karamat Ali, analyses the role of education policy in bringing about social change in the country. The chapter points out the detrimental role of abrupt changes in the education policy, such as the shifting of focus from primary education to higher education. Karamat Ali tries to show that the failure to attain the required literacy level is the result of these policies, which diverted funds to higher education at the cost of primary education. Employment opportunities could not keep pace with population growth. The small size of the formal sector could not create enough jobs to accommodate highly educated graduates. Therefore, a significant majority of the higher educated persons could not participate in the development process of the country. The migration to urban areas by lower educated workers aspiring for better future prospects resulted in overcrowded cities. The industrial sector could not expand at the level required to absorb the ever-growing labour force. The agriculture sector provided shelter to many jobless youth and absorbed a significant proportion of the population. The job opportunities were further restricted by the choice of capital-intensive technology, which displaced many workers. Training institutions could not significantly influence the skill level in the country due to their inability to introduce modern skills. Therefore, the small-scale industrial sector remained tied to old techniques of production. The author concludes that education could not bring about any change in the country except creating false expectations among the educated.

Despite the active role of females in labour market activities in the industrial economies, developing countries remained marred with low participation rates by females. This lack of interest has diminished their role as partners in the development process. In Pakistani society, females face a number of barriers to entry in the labour market due to illiteracy. These barriers restricted their possibly active role in the growth of the economy. The policy-makers are still struggling to find ways to increase the literacy level of women so that they also actively participate in the labour market.

The second chapter of the book looks into the issue of female education and the ways to improve it. The main focus of the chapter is the critical issue of the attitude of the general public towards female education. In general, people in Pakistan do not favour female education and view it as a Western tool to spoil them. The authors of this chapter, Karamat Ali, Abdul Hamid, and Nahid Zia Khan, believe that revolutionary measures are needed to change this attitude of the public and raise the literacy level among females. To reinforce the argument, the authors cite many examples of different countries which have successfully designed and implemented such policies. There are some important suggestions in the chapter to improve the overall educational level in the country, particularly female enrolment in educational

institutions. The paper emphasises on making education compulsory through legislation, and on a strong monitoring system for implementation.

The next chapter, written by Karamat Ali and Abdul Hamid, focuses on the problems faced by women engaged in economic activities in the rural informal sector of the country. It is noted that female effort is underestimated and the contribution made by the female population has never been acknowledged. The activities of the female workers in the rural areas are particularly important. They participate in a number of activities, besides performing household tasks, but their work has never been counted towards the national income. They work more hours but receive wages much lower than women working in the urban centres. It is sad to note that this important and usually politically silent segment of society, especially rural women, is ignored most of the time in the framing of national policies. The chapter concludes with the observation that economic rather than the social and cultural factors are responsible for the plight of rural women.

Child labour is a pervasive problem in the underdeveloped world. The severity of the problem is high in South Asia, where the highest number of children is economically active. The issue of child labour is complicated and linked to other social problems of society such as poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment of adults. The unchecked high population growth, together with slow economic progress, has worsened the problem. According to a survey of child labour carried out in 1996, more than 3 million children are economically active in Pakistan. The chapter on child labour, by Karamat Ali and Abdul Hamid, focuses on the issue of female child labour, which is even more serious. These children work in a dangerous environment, receive low wages, and work more hours as compared to adult workers. There is no monitoring system to check the violence against these children, who mostly work in the informal sector. The majority of girl children serve as domestic servants, who are employed in affluent households. The author suggests better provision of education and vocational training facilities to break the cycle of economic exploitation of children. In his opinion, simply passing child labour legislation will not help; rather, it would further complicate the situation.

The chapter written by Karamat Ali and Abdul Hamid links productivity and efficiency to growth. It highlights the role of capital and labour in bringing about technical change to achieve growth. The analysis shows that the contribution of capital towards bringing about technical change is 50 percent, which is quite high. The labour component is contributing about 20 percent in agriculture and 10 percent in the industrial sector. The chapter stresses the need of bringing efficiency to the system by utilising the labour optimally. The chapter on employment, by M. Aslam Chaudhry and Abdul Hamid, tries to identify the factors responsible for unemployment and underemployment, and suggests ways of dealing with them. It is noted that underemployment has emerged as a major challenge due to its rapid growth, especially in the rural areas. The chapter emphasises the need to implement

those policies which can generate employment. If the unemployment problem is not tackled amicably, it can sabotage the whole development process and harm the social fabric of society.

The issue of poverty has been addressed in the next two chapters. Both the chapters, written by Shah Nawaz Malik, note that many landless households managed to escape poverty in the rural areas whereas many cultivator families fell into the poverty web. Many factors are identified for such an outcome. Some of them include the size of the cultivated landholdings, size of the households, educational attainment of the family, and dependency ratio in the household. The chapter recommends setting up of institutions for distribution of assets and access to resources. The results of the second chapter indicate that there is a negative correlation between poverty and agricultural wages.

The distribution impact of foreign aid is discussed in a chapter written by Nahid Zia Khan and Karamat Ali. The conclusion is that a very small amount of foreign aid has been allocated to education and health. Therefore, foreign aid has no significant relation to human resource development in the country. The policies of different regimes are analysed in the next chapter, written by Fayyaz Baqir and Karamat Ali. It recommends improvement of human resource development in the country. The chapter emphasises the need to focus on human resource development aid as it contributes significantly to the development process. The developments taking place in science and technology are the result of vigorous HRD policies in the world. If Pakistan does not adopt such policies, it will never be able to catch up with the developed countries. A similar message is contained in the last chapter.

The book is a good attempt at raising an issue of prime importance which has a direct bearing on the development of the country. To invest in human resource development is the key to the solution of the problems faced by the country. We have to develop policies targeting the specific areas and then strongly implementing them. For this we need political will and consistent effort.

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